



Health-e-AME: A Faith-based Physical Activity Initiative for African Americans in South Carolina

Issue

African Americans suffer disproportionately from cardiovascular disease and diabetes. An important risk factor for developing these diseases is lack of sufficient physical activity which contributes to overweight and obesity. Rates of participation in physical activity of at least moderate intensity are lower among African Americans than among non-Hispanic Caucasians, especially for African American women.

Although relatively few physical activity interventions have been carried out among African American adults, some important components of successful interventions have been identified. In particular, programs that are culturally tailored, contain strategies for reinforcement and social support, and involve community churches appear promising. Unfortunately, most of the physical activity initiatives that have been previously evaluated with African Americans have focused on small urban or rural populations and have largely excluded men.

“We’ve seen virtually a doubling in the number of obese persons over the past two decades and this has profound health implications. Obesity increases a person’s risk for a number of serious conditions, including diabetes, heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, and some types of cancer.”

Tommy G. Thompson
Secretary, Health and Human Services

Response

Researchers from the Medical University of South Carolina are involved in a participatory project with 608 AME churches across the state to increase moderate level physical activity among African Americans. The strategies for increasing physical activity will be developed in collaboration with AME church members and implemented in churches that choose to participate in the program. Strategies are likely to include education about physical activity, reinforcement, social support, and training in activities of interest to the church, such as Praise Aerobics (moving to gospel music) and walking clubs.

The specific aims of the project are numerous and include the following:

- Increasing interest and readiness related to participation in physical activity;
- Increasing overall amount of physical activity by at least 15%; and
- Sustaining interest and participation in physical activity after the research project ends.

This project will provide valuable information about strategies for involving churches in efforts to increase physical activity among African American men and women.

March 2003

More Information

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This research grant is funded through the second round of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) Extramural Prevention Research Program (EPRP). The EPRP is committed to funding prevention research that has direct relevance for policy and practice by having researchers invite health professionals and communities to participate in the research process - including identifying research questions of importance to their community and interpreting and applying the study findings in their community. The EPRP supports many such community-based research grants throughout the United States.

For more information about CDC’s EPRP, please contact Lawrence W. Green, Dr.P.H., Director, Office of Science and Extramural Research, Public Health Practice Program Office, CDC, 4770 Buford Highway, NE, Mailstop K-56, Atlanta, GA 30341-3724
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